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SUBJECT: Syrian Prospects for Acquiring the SS-23
 NES A M#86-20142

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

10 September 1986

Syrian Prospects for Acquiring the SS-23

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Summary

Israel is worried that Syria will soon acquire the new SS-23 short-range ballistic missile, but we do not believe that the Soviets will export it in the near term. The Soviets want to demonstrate solid support for their most important Arab ally, but at the same time they want to discourage Syrian President Assad from acting rashly against Israel.

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they want to be particularly careful to avoid exposing the SS-23 to Western exploitation.

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Considering that the SS-23 SRBM had previously been described in the Western press as part of the growing tactical ballistic threat to airfields, the Syrians almost certainly were aware of the system and probably requested SS-23s as part of a new arms package. We believe that Israeli concerns about the export of the SS-23 are well-founded.

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 This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Levant Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis at the request of OSD/ISA. Information as of 10 September 1986 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments should be addressed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division,

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In their negotiations with Moscow, the Syrians apparently are using the war scare with Israel this May and the perceived poor performance of Soviet weaponry during the US-Libyan clashes to argue for the delivery of advanced military equipment. The Soviets probably feel under pressure to bolster their most important ally in the Arab world. Consequently, Moscow almost certainly will live up to its commitment and soon begin deliveries of the MIG-29, a counterpart of the US F-16, and probably will agree to provide other new arms. We expect President Assad will travel to the USSR later this year to sign a new agreement. [redacted]

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We believe that the arms agreement will call for the Soviets to provide T-80 tanks and additional air defense missile systems--probably including the SA-11--but we judge they are unlikely to agree to export either the SU-27 Flanker fighter, a counterpart to the US F-15 Eagle, or the SS-23 within the next few years. The Soviets are clearly determined to provide Syria with enough modern equipment to discourage an Israeli attack, but they want to prevent their newest technology from being compromised and seem leery about providing equipment that could embolden Assad to act rashly. With its improved conventional munitions warhead, high accuracy, and 500-kilometer range, the SS-23 could be launched from existing operating areas near Damascus against high-value targets anywhere in Israel. [redacted]

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[redacted] we believe the Soviets will adhere to their standard practice of delivering new ground forces equipment to their troops in Eastern Europe before they export it. [redacted]

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